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Zoe Haenggi Wattenberg

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Reels of Israel: Cinematic Portrayals of the Relationship between Arabs, Americans, and Jews

By

Zoe Haengi Wattenberg

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One-hundred years of war, thousands of deaths, and no sensible diplomatic solution, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is summarized by the words of a Palestinian agent in the film *Munich*, “home is everything.”¹ This simple concept rests at the heart of the conflict as both the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians want a nation to call their home, and the only reasonable space for both of them is the land surrounding the holy city of Jerusalem. Divided between the Palestinian populated East and the Israeli populated West, Jerusalem remains at the focus of the conflict as the spiritual epicenter of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim biblical tradition. In their efforts to establish, define, and defend their home, both the Israelis and the Palestinians are locked in an ongoing conflict fueled by sentiment and the idea of nationhood.

Israel’s significance to the United States and the Western world evolved throughout the twentieth century, culminating in its position as a strategic partner placed squarely in the center of ongoing political debate in the Middle East. The philosophy of containment during the Cold War and Israel’s position as a buffer for the West from Soviet expansion heightened American interests in the region.² Further, The Holocaust served as a catalyst for support to create a Jewish State in Palestine.³ While at first the creation of a Jewish State was mostly a Zionist cause, the images of concentration camps and Jewish refugees in Newsreels and documentaries after WWII propelled support for a Jewish State into the mainstream. There was no single Hollywood narrative when it came to Israel, but there were reoccurring motifs throughout the films, such as Israel as a refuge for the suffering and an ally against terrorism. However, other films challenged these notions by introducing the conflicting image of Israel as a powerful force of persecution

¹ Steven Spielberg, dir. *Munich* (2005, United States: Universal Pictures), Digital.

² Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest: a Critical Examination* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 2.

³ Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View the Jewish State as an Ally* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 24.

against Palestinians. Depending on someone's perception, Israel was either the salvation for Jewish refugees fleeing Europe or the conquering nation that forced their way into an already occupied country, creating just another refugee problem.

Hollywood films about Jews and Israel supported a narrative of American exceptionalism while bolstering support for a Jewish state abroad. After the Holocaust Israel became the fundamental solution to Jewish suffering. Filmmakers used the images of the Nazi death camps to express the need of a Jewish state. In the 1970s and 1980s, the dynamics of Israel in world politics shifted as the Israel-Palestine conflict accelerated. The depiction of Palestinians as terrorists in films continued the narrative of a continued threat to Jewish life and furthered apparent necessity of a stable home in Israel. The role of American characters in films depicting the Holocaust and the Israel-Palestine conflict supported a narrative of the United States as savior and "world's policeman." Hollywood's portrayal of the Jews focused on an understanding of American ideals to appeal to a general audience, while also shaping perception of founding Israel as an American phenomenon, both in its war efforts and in the ongoing peace negotiations.

In the years after WWII Jewish identity in film formed in relation to the horror of the Holocaust and the political narrative of Israel in the United States. American film depicted the Holocaust as the cause of Jewish suffering, which included both physical and mental pain. As author Julian Levinson discusses in his article "The Maimed Body and the Tortured Soul: Holocaust Survivors in American Film," the physical pain refers to the depiction of Jews inside concentration camps, and the mental pain is the internal suffering of survivors struggling to assimilate to society.⁴ In his article, Levinson establishes a key timeline for understanding films

⁴ Julian Levinson, "The Maimed Body and the Tortured Soul: Holocaust Survivors in American Film," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 17, no. 1 (2004), 142.

portraying the Holocaust. He notes that in the 1940s and 1950s, American films considered themes of the Holocaust within the broader plot and setting of WWII or the foundation of Israel. While in the 1960s, specifically after the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, the films began to aim at raising awareness of the individual atrocities of the Holocaust.⁵ The development of Jewish identity and the role of Israel in film coincided with the shifting image of Jewish suffering.

Academics have debated the purpose of depicting the Holocaust in American film and how that image of the Holocaust reflects the historical event. Many historians and academics criticize filmmakers for trivializing the events of the Holocaust. One of the most adamant voices in these criticisms is Ilan Avisar, who argues that the Holocaust was such a uniquely abhorrent evil that reproducing its images for entertainment undermines its severity.⁶ Others, such as Judith E. Doneson and Lawrence Baron, argue that film plays a key role in allowing the mass public to remember the Holocaust by supporting education and discussion.⁷ However, Tim Cole writes about the equation of the Holocaust and the produced image in films in the minds of Americans. He warns that film “attempts to draw simple lessons from this complicated past.”⁸ As time progressed, the representation of the Holocaust transitioned from the stories and memories of survivors to the reconstruction of the events in academic studies and popular culture.

Zionists attempted to cultivate the idea that Jewish identity was synonymous with the Jewish state through the use of universalism. Universalism refers to the likeness of all Jews to one another as well as the similarities of Jews to other Westerners. Films used both definitions

⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁶ Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 3.

⁷ Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 4.

⁸ Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History Is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 2000), xi

simultaneously as images of Jews as a unique people victimized by antisemitism coincided with themes reaffirming the idea that Jews were no different than other Western citizens.⁹ Using the concept of universalism, supporters of Israel argued that American Jews should care as personally about the Holocaust and Israel as the suffering refugees leaving Europe. However, the question of dual loyalty troubled many American Jews because of their identity as loyal citizens.¹⁰ Dual loyalty, originally an antisemitic term, was the concept that Jews had split loyalty between the Jewish culture and their home country.¹¹ To dispel the myth of the unpatriotic Jew, films in the 1940s and 1950s portrayed the assimilation of Jews into society as a priority over individual characters in the Holocaust.¹² Looking at how films depicted the Holocaust, the foundation of the State of Israel, and Jewish assimilation into American culture, it is evident that Hollywood contributed to the narrative of Jewish identity and the characterization of the foundation of Israel in Palestine.

Portrayals of Jews in Israel and the United States

The Holocaust served to foster support for the necessity of a Jewish State, which brought the discussion of Zionism and the increasing Israel-Palestine conflict to the forefront after the end of WWII. Overall, Israel's representation in film was only a simplified version of the historical events of the establishment of the Jewish State and the resulting series of wars between Israel and Palestine. Both Zionists and the Palestinians claimed the land of Israel, located on the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean, bordering Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and the Red

⁹ Mart, *Eye on Israel*, 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹¹ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 147: The term is still used today but instead of focusing on split loyalty it represents full loyalty to both Israel and their home country simultaneously.

¹² Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 72.

Sea. Zionism was the political movement for the establishment of a Jewish State founded in 1897 and reached its height between the years of 1942 and 1947.¹³ Zionism, like all political ideologies, has developed and changed throughout its existence. In 1917 the British signed the Balfour Declaration, which promised the Zionists a national home in Palestine, but it did not directly specify its borders.¹⁴ The Balfour Declaration charged Jews to move to Palestine, but power still rested with the British in Palestine until the British Mandate ended when the United Nations voted on the Partition of Palestine in 1947, which won by a vote of 33 to 13.¹⁵ As a result, conflict in the area accelerated into a war between the Zionists and the Palestinians.

In 1948, the United States recognized the State of Israel, reaffirming their position in the Middle East as a Western ally. The 1948 war ended without real resolution, as many other major wars followed throughout the twentieth century. Both the Zionists and the Palestinians claimed the land on the premise that they were there first. The Zionists date their presence in the land on the biblical story of Abraham's settlement of Canaan. The Palestinians claimed the land based on their continued residency in the area for thousands of years.¹⁶ Ultimately, the increased persecution of Jews during the twentieth century leading to the events of the Holocaust motivated the Western world's support for the creation of Israel on humanitarian need for a Jewish refuge.¹⁷ The creation of Israel forced around 770,000 Palestinians away from their homes as they fled warzones. Most expected to go back after the violence ended, but Israel's government did not allow them to return, creating a massive refugee problem in the surrounding

¹³ Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest*, 25-26.

¹⁴ Benny Morris, *Righteous victims: a history of the Zionist-Arab conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 75.

¹⁵ Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest*, 34.

¹⁶ Frank H. Epp, *Whose Land Is Palestine?: The Middle East Problem in Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 27-28.

¹⁷ Mart, *Eye on Israel*, 23-24.

nations.¹⁸ Israel and Palestine have not yet found peace, and debates over the organization of the land continue today.

Reflecting the narrative of Israel as a home for Jews after increased persecution in Europe, films made in the United States, especially in the 1940s through the 1960s largely supported Jewish migration to Israel and the establishment of the Jewish State. One way that filmmakers attempted to foster support for Israel after its foundation was the idea that all Jews shared in their experience of persecution and the right to a home in Zion. Since the discovery of the horrific operations within the concentration camps during WWII, the Holocaust in the American mind prevailed as the prime example of persecution, hatred, and antisemitism directed squarely at the Jewish people. The majority of films about the Holocaust focused on the plight of the Jews. Films such as *The Juggler*, *Singing in the Dark*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Schindler's List*, and others, depicted the Holocaust as a solely Jewish phenomenon. Jewish identity was eternally linked to the events of the Holocaust, as Jews appeared in film as connected to one another through an understanding of persecution and personal threat. As Michelle Mart poetically writes, "all victims of the Nazis were not Jews, but all Jews were victims."¹⁹ The universality of the Jews established within films made in the twenty years following the Holocaust shaped the way Jews related to Israel and continued to justify the need for a Jewish State.

As films pushed for a universal understanding of Jewish experience, the Holocaust emerged as a uniting factor between Jews all over the world. In the 1956 film, *Singing in the Dark*, a Jewish Holocaust survivor lives in the United States with amnesia concerning his

¹⁸ Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest*, 45.

¹⁹ Mart, *Eye on Israel*, 19.

experience in Europe.²⁰ He does not remember his name or what happened to him. Throughout the film the characters discuss the importance of memory, urging American Jews to empathize with the Jewish refugees and victims of the Nazis. The film's emphasis on light and dark throughout the film, representing ignorance and knowledge, suggested that people could not stay blissfully ignorant to painful events, for not having knowledge was a pain in itself. The film encouraged American audiences to be aware of the Holocaust and its lasting effect. As the Holocaust targeted Jews without regard of their origin, the film also suggested that American Jews should personally identify with the victims of the Holocaust even though they did not experience the Holocaust directly. The film mandated that Jews from around the world and from different backgrounds take the genocide as personally as the victims of concentration camps.

The few films that include non-Jewish characters within the concentration camps, including Karel from *The Search* and Sophie from *Sophie's Choice*, acknowledged Jews as the Nazis primary targets furthering the idea of increased need for a Jewish refuge in Israel. Made in 1948, *The Search*, incorporated the narrative of the universal Jew as the Jewish children in the UNRA camps represented Jewish suffering as a whole and intended to evoke pity from the viewer. American officials send Karel to a UNRRA camp, where the other lost children are primarily Jewish and in the process of emigrating to Palestine. Karel escapes, fearful that this camp might be like the concentration camps where the Nazis initially separated him from his mother. As the son of a politically prominent father, the Nazis imprisoned Karel along with his mother and sister. Similarly, in *Sophie's Choice*, made in 1982, Sophie was a political objector and therefore considered a threat to the regime. Neither Karel or Sophie are Jewish, yet the Nazis

²⁰ Max Nosseck, dir. *Singing in the Dark* (1956, New York: A.N.O. Productions Inc.) Digital.

target them along with the Jews and imprison them in concentration camps.²¹ In *Sophie's Choice*, the Nazis forced Sophie to choose which of her two children was to die, leaving Sophie in a deteriorating mental state. In one harrowing scene, Sophie's boyfriend antagonizes her because she survived and so many Jews died. Though *The Search* and *Sophie's Choice* premiered nearly forty years apart, they both depicted prisoners who the Nazis considered political threats, while still highlighting Jews as the prevailing victims of the Holocaust.

With the narrative that the Holocaust targeted Jews above any other people established in American popular culture, Steven Spielberg's popular film *Schindler's List* uses the established collective identity and universalism to make a statement for the support of Israel in the 1990s. By the 1990s Israel was a fully established state, allowing filmmakers to look back at the Holocaust's connection to Israel. Spielberg linked Israel to the liberation of concentration camps, reminding viewers in the 1990s of the refugee roots of Israel. In the film's conclusion, a Soviet officer rides into the factory, and exclaims to all the workers laying on the ground outside that they are liberated. He is unprepared for the sight of Schindler's Jews, who are relatively better kept than the other camps. The following dialogue highlights the narrative of Israel in the film:

Jewish man: Where should we go?
Soviet Officer: Don't go East, that's for sure, they hate you there. I wouldn't
 go west either if I were you.
Jewish man: We could use some food.
Soviet Officer: Isn't that a town over there?²²

The subsequent scene pictures Schindler's Jews moving across barren land towards a nearby town. The imagery parallels the biblical forty-year migration of the Jewish people to the promised land. This clear reference to Israel, neither East or West, suggests that Israel is a home

²¹ Fred Zinnemann, dir. *The Search* (1948, United States and Switzerland: MGM, 2013) Digital., Alan J. Pakula, dir. *Sophie's Choice* (1982, United States: Universal Pictures), Digital.

²² Steven Spielberg, dir. *Schindler's List* (1993, United States: Universal Pictures), Digital.

for the lost and the abandoned. The happy ending serves a purpose more than simply appealing to a larger audience. It reinforces the idea that Israel is the savior of hope, and while Europe struggled to provide adequate support for dislocated Jews, Israel provides a home that no other country could.

The juxtaposition between the films set in Israel and those set in the United States highlights the way films impacted the perception of Israel as the singular home for Jews after the Holocaust. Films that depicted refugees in America focused on incurable emotional trauma while those set in Israel, such as *The Sword in the Desert*, *The Juggler*, *Exodus*, *Judith*, and *Cast a Giant Shadow* focused on hope for a better future. *The Juggler* established Israel as a peaceful land and a place of recovery. The film's main character, Hans Müller, struggles with psychological trauma from the experience in the concentration camps similar to the emotional trauma depicted in the films set in the United States. In the beginning of the film, while Hans is entering the camp for the first time, he thinks he sees his dead wife standing outside waiting for him. He approaches her hesitantly, but he is soon in tears begging her to recognize him. When a police officer approaches and taps him, Hans immediately backs away in fear, clinching his fists and states "you're Israel, full of policemen."²³ His aversion to the police officer stems from an association to the SS officers in Germany, not a negative image of Israeli police. Instead, the presence of the police in the film shows the viewer the established order and development of Israel as a nation. In the scene, the woman was not mad or scared, instead she felt sorry for him as she also experienced the war and was tolerant of his improper behavior because of their shared experience. Later in the film, after an altercation with a man that results in the man going to the hospital. Hans meets Ya'El, who helps him realize his trauma as she pleads, "darling this is

²³ Edward Dmytryk, dir. *The Juggler* (1953, United States: Columbia Pictures, 2011) DVD.

your home. Think what you are doing. You haven't locked us out, you have locked yourself in."²⁴ He exits the room, symbolizing his reentering of society, and the narrative of the Kibbutz and Israel as refuge for scarred Jews comes to fruition. Jews in Israel were able to find solace in the Kibbutz and in the State of Israel which was full of like-minded and law-abiding citizens.

While the films set in Israel focused on perpetuating a narrative of capable and hopeful Jews, the films set in the United States, such as *Sophie's Choice* and *The Pawnbroker* highlight the struggle to assimilate into society after experiencing a concentration camp. 1964's *The Pawnbroker* was the first American film to construct fictional sets to depict flashback Holocaust scenes instead of relying on Newsreel footage.²⁵ This allowed for detailed flashbacks to the concentration camps, highlighting the emotional scars left on individual survivors rather than the physical pain of all Jews. In *The Pawnbroker*, Sol Nazerman runs a pawn shop in East Harlem. He is emotionally distant from those around him, evident in his lack of sympathy for the variety of characters that come into his shop. Nazerman struggles to walk down the street while leaving his shop, as images from his times in the camps bombard his conscience. The scene flashes between Nazerman in the United States trying to get into his car as a group attacks someone behind a fence and a memory of someone screaming trying to escape a concentration camp. As the scene rapidly switches between past and present, the insistent dog barking in the background gets louder and the scene finally ends as Nazerman almost hits someone while driving away.²⁶ As both Sophie and Nazerman have trouble adapting to American society, their continued suffering in the film suggested that the war did not end with the liberation of the concentration camps. Instead, their traumatic experience enabled them to adapt to a society that was largely

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Levinson, "The Maimed Body and the Tortured Soul," 149.

²⁶ Sidney Lumet, dir. *The Pawnbroker* (1965, United States: Allied Artists, 2015), Digital.

ignorant to their suffering. While these films do not mention Israel, they present a landscape of despair in American society, countering the hope filled narrative in the films set in Israel.

Though Israel appeared as the single home for the Holocaust survivor, American Jewish identity in film diversified throughout the twentieth century. Unlike previous films which promoted universalism, *The Chosen*, highlighted the differences between Jews in America. The film depicted two Jewish sects, Orthodox and Reform, coming together to look at the question of Jewish national identity in America. Made in 1981, *The Chosen* challenged earlier notions of the universal Jew with the discussion of Jewish support for the creation of the Jewish state in the United States in the 1940s. The plot chronicles the friendship between two Jewish boys, Reuven and Danny, in New York City during and immediately after WWII. Reuven is the son of an adamant Zionist father and Danny is the son of a Hasidic Rabbi. After footage of the concentration camp reached the United States, the contrasting reaction from both fathers highlights the complication of Jewish Identity. Reuven's Zionist father, depicting the familiar universal image of the Jew to support Israel, exclaims "We are the Survivors. It's up to us to keep our people alive. We cannot wait for God." However, Danny explains that, as a Hasidic Rabbi, his father is not convinced, "to my father the idea of a Jewish state that is not religious is a violation of everything he believes."²⁷ To the Rabbi, only the Messiah can establish a new Jewish State. This dichotomy of Jewish identity directly contradicts the idea of a singular Jewish opinion on Israel. While Reuven's father believed he had a role to play in Israel as an American Jew, Danny's father openly protested the foundation of the State of Israel because of his Jewish identity and beliefs. The differences between Reuven's Zionist father and Danny's religious

²⁷ Jeremy Kagan, dir. *The Chosen* (1981, United States: 20th Century Fox, 2010), DVD.

father highlighted that Jews differed in their position of Israel and reflected the Jewish religious diversity in the United States.

In the 1980s, *The Chosen* introduced complex Jewish Characters in the United States who differed on their position in the development of Israel, but the discussion of opinions among Israeli Jews was not discussed. In 2005 the film *Munich* depicted undercover Israeli agents hunting Palestinians involved with the 1972 Munich Massacre at the Olympic Games. As the film progressed, the Israeli assassins questioned the morality of their actions. Though he was trained to defuse bombs, Robert made the explosives that the team used to target the accused Palestinian terrorists. In a discussion with the team leader, he states his reluctance to continue with the operation:

Robert: We're Jews, Avner. Jews don't do wrong because our enemies do wrong.

Avner: We can't afford to be that decent anymore.

Robert: I don't know that we ever were that decent. Suffering thousands of years of hatred doesn't make you decent. But we're supposed to be righteous. That's a beautiful thing. That's Jewish. That's what I knew, that's what I was taught. And now I'm losing it, and I lose that, that's- That's- That's everything. That's my soul.²⁸

While in previous films the concept of antisemitism and the Holocaust served as enough reason to support Israel, *Munich* stipulated that it was the Jews' moral superiority over the Palestinians that warranted support for Israel. The discussion of Jewish identity highlighted the position of Israel as an Western nation and affirmed the ethical nature the Israelis. Although their actions were regrettable, their moral character was not questioned in the film. In the film, the Palestinians killed without question of stopping, but the Israelis considered their position, returned to their families with remorse, and inevitably suffered because of their actions. *Munich*

²⁸ Steven Spielberg, dir. *Munich* (2005, United States: Universal Pictures), Digital.

represented the culmination of Jewish identity in film as Israeli agents defend their nation in retaliation of targeted persecution, proving to viewers both their strength and their humanity.

Antisemitism in the United States and Americans in Israel

As the perception of Israelis shifted from victims, to vigilantes, to international spies, the depiction of the United States adapted from rescuer to ally and peace negotiator. The United States' role in the debate over the creation of the Jewish State highlighted the perception of the United States as the ultimate authority dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust. While still facing antisemitism at home, the United States' recognition of Israel along with the United Nations in 1948 definitively placed the United States on the side of the Israelis. In 1978, the United States successfully negotiated a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. Many Palestinians found that the agreement was strongly swayed in Israel's favor, and they raised \$3.5 billion dollars for the fight against Israel.²⁹ Still, western nations praised the agreement and the possibility of peace in the Middle East. In American film, the Camp David Accords cemented the United States' role as the mediator between Israel and Palestine.

The portrayal of the United States and U.S. citizens in films that discuss the foundation of Israel support a narrative of American exceptionalism and grandeur. Though it is understandable that American's would play the protagonist in American made movies; these films perpetuate a narrative of the United States as the decisive hero, which clouds the perception of Jews having autonomy over their own lives both in the United States and in Israel. While Jews represented the persecuted and the British and Arabs represented the persecutors, Americans interjected as moral champions and intermediaries. The films *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Sword in the Desert*,

²⁹ Morris, *Righteous victims*, 476.

The Ambassador, *Deadline*, and *Judgement at Nuremberg* appealed to American patriotism and ideas of freedom and liberty.

Before support for a Jewish state spread in the United States, filmmakers addressed the issue of antisemitism at home. Films such as *Gentleman's Agreement* in 1947 and *The Young Lions* in 1958, discussed the eradication of antisemitism and the growing support for Jews in American society. Both films use a patriotic appeal to stop Antisemitism in America. For example, in *Gentleman's Agreement* Phil Green, goes undercover as a Jew in order to expose antisemitism in American society. Green's experience telling people he was Jewish highlighted the presence of antisemitism in all aspects of life and from all people, including people who claimed to attest antisemitism. However, the film's premise, of a journalist being able to experience being a Jew simply by stating that he was one implied that antisemitism defined Jewish identity.³⁰ In addition, it supported the idea that it required a gentile American in order to help the Jewish people. This perpetuated the idea of the Jewish victim outside of the events of the Holocaust and suggested a universal Jewish experience. Green learns that a resort he wants to stay at is "restricted" meaning they do not allow Jews to stay there. He decides to go and confront them saying to his hesitant girlfriend, "They're persistent little traitors to everything this country stands for and stands on and you have to fight them not just for the 'poor, poor Jews,' as Dave says but for everything this country stands for."³¹ Beyond a moral responsibility and having sympathy for the Jews, the film suggested that it was simply unamerican to be antisemitic. Though most films include Jewish characters in the fight against antisemitism, it is

³⁰ Mart, *Eye on Israel*, 9.

³¹ Elia Kazan, dir. *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947, United States: Twentieth Century Fox). Digital.

ultimately the Gentile Americans that appear as the hero or have the agency in the decision making.

In 1949, *Sword in the Desert* premiered as the first American film set in the newly established Jewish State. The protagonist of the film was an American ship captain, Mike, who the Zionists hired to smuggle refugees into British Mandated Palestine. The plot focuses on his evolution of support for the Zionist organization as the British follow and eventually capture the valiant freedom fighters. The overarching intended message of the movie is summarized in Mike's character development. In the beginning of the film, Mike has no intention of putting himself or his crew in danger for the refugees, as he states "If I hadn't missed a load of fertilizer I wouldn't have even listened to your deal... They mean \$125 bucks a head plus the bonus. They also mean I'm carrying hot cargo, illegal immigrants without papers. Okay, I took that chance and I got you here, but what happens to you from here on doesn't mean a thing to me."³² Mike, as an American, feels separated from the Zionist cause to establish Israel as a Jewish State. His lack of empathy in the beginning of the film and his apathetic attitude to the wellbeing of the refugees reflected an idea that the United States had no active role to play in the establishment of Israel. However, by the end of the film Mike supports the Zionists after fleeing from the British with them and learning about their movement. In the end, he decided to put his own security at jeopardy to protect the Zionist cause from the British interrogators. His loyalty to their movement and his pivotal role in protecting the Zionists highlighted America's image as defenders of freedom for the Jewish people in Palestine. Through Mike's change in attitude about the Zionist cause resulting in his unwavering support for Israel, the movie called for action over

³² George Sherman, dir. *Sword in the Desert* (1949, United States: Universal Pictures), Digital.

inaction and reinforced the idea that the United States had an important role to play in the establishment of Israel and in future Israeli politics.

To appeal to a Christian audience in the United States, many films adhered to Christian symbolism and motifs throughout the imagery and the staging of pivotal scenes. Following WWII, the concept of universalism encouraged ecumenical discussions among Christians, highlighting service to a global community. The emphasis on Christianity and religion in the Cold War differentiated Western values from the altruism of Communist countries and highlighted the moral superiority of the West, Capitalism, democracy, and freedom in the minds of Americans.³³ Though people viewed the Cold War as primarily a diplomatic and political conflict, Western propaganda often focused on morality and religion as a key way to differentiate between the West and the East.³⁴ Films also used religion to appeal to a Western audience, depicting American protagonists as righteous Christians supporting their Jewish brethren.

In *Sword in the Desert* and *Cast a Giant Shadow*, Christmas provided a setting for answering questions of moral obligation. In *Sword in the Desert* the British captured Mike, an American, along with a group of Zionists and ask him to identify their leader in exchange for his release and safe passage back to the United States. As he walks towards the lineup intending to betray the Zionists, Christmas music sounds dramatically in the background. The short conversation between Major Sorrell and Mike about the Christmas tree marks the moment Mike changes his mind.

Maj. Sorrell: How do you like our Christmas tree Captain?
Mike: So that's what it is.
Maj. Sorrell: It's the only thing we could find in this desolate part of Palestine.
They call it the Judas Tree.
Mike: The What?

³³ Mart, *Eye on Israel*, 87-88.

³⁴ Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Great Britain, Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 105.

Maj. Sorrell: According to the Bible, Judas hanged himself on a tree after the betrayal. The legend says it was a tree like this?³⁵

He continues to walk slowly past each member in the lineup, deciding to keep the leader's identity a secret. Mike's character development and support for Israel comes to fruition in his decision to help the Zionists instead of himself. The Christian motivation to his character transformation highlighted his moral reasoning for helping the Zionists over logical understanding of the conflict. In both *Sword in the Desert* and *Cast a Giant Shadow*, the ultimate heroes are American and make their pivotal decision to help the Israeli's in a Christmas setting. The connection between Christianity and Judaism made in these films suggested an overarching appeal to Christian U.S. citizens to support Israel and their position in the Middle East.

Films served an important function in helping to define the United States' role in the world after the Holocaust. Filmmakers gave the moral imperative to the U.S. citizens in films discussing the Holocaust, highlighting the United States as the world's principled police and judge. *Judgement at Nuremberg* features a respectable U.S. Judge who values justice and reason.³⁶ Throughout the film, Judge Haywood seeks the inglorious truth about the events of the Holocaust, asking everyone he meets questions about their position on the war and their relationship to Nazism. He does so without contempt, his only motive is to understand in order to make the fairest judgement possible on the indictment of a doctor who operated within the Nazi party. Cementing the United States purpose to balance the world's problems, Judge Haywood stands out as the authority on right and wrong, differentiating between good and bad German, and forgiving those who could not do more. The discussion of the United States' role in Israel

³⁵ George Sherman, dir. *Sword in the Desert* (1949, United States: Universal Pictures), Digital.

³⁶ Stanley Kramer, dir. *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961, United States: United Artists, 2015), DVD

coincided with filmmakers' definition of the United States as the authoritative opinion in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Films such as *Sword in the Desert*, *The Search*, and *Cast a Giant Shadow* feature Americans as the primary decision makers in Israel. They do not only serve alongside the Zionists, but lead them or protect them using the simple privilege of being U.S. citizens.

Cold War politics in the 1950s and 1960s contributed to a shift in the relationship between Israel and the United States. The fear of Soviet backed Arab nationalism in the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s prompted the United States into providing military aid to Israel, which resulted in Israel's victory in the Six Day War in 1967.³⁷ Though President Kennedy sought to limit Israel's nuclear program, during the Johnson Administration the United States turned a blind eye to Israel's nuclear program in order to maintain Israel as a Cold War ally as tensions in the Middle East accelerated.³⁸ While other nations signed the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty in regard to the handling of nuclear weapons, Israel did not.³⁹ After Israel's victory in the Six Days War, the Jewish State's position in world politics and its connection to the United States strengthened. U.S aid to Israel before the Six Day War was mostly for food and housing development which averaged around \$63 million. After the Six Day War, U.S. aid rapidly increased reaching \$102 million by 1970, \$634.5 million in 1971, and \$2.3 billion in 1976, making Israel the largest annual beneficiary of U.S. foreign aid.⁴⁰ Most of the money went to the Israeli military. The narrative of the Jew as victim shifted as escalating Cold War tensions

³⁷ Douglas Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-68," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 4 (1993): 563-564.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 567.

³⁹ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 35-36; Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship," 569.

⁴⁰ Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 26; Jeremy Sharp, "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel," *Congressional Research Service*, December 22, 2016.

created a need for a U.S. ally in the Middle East. The new narrative highlighted Israeli Jews as a self-contained community and it strengthened the concept the universal Jew. In films such as *Sword in the Desert*, *Exodus*, *Cast a Giant Shadow*, and *Judith* the Zionists appeared as underdog heroes, oppressed by imperial dictators and threatened by Arab militants. However, films from the 1980s about Israel and Jewish identity in America exhibited the close alliance between the strengthened Israeli State and the United States.

As conflict between Israel and the Middle East heightened and Americans became wary of an everlasting war in the Middle East, U.S. heroism switched from valiant soldier fighting alongside Zionists to ethical representative of peace and freedom. The 1980s action films, including *The Little Drummer Girl*, *The Ambassador*, and *Deadline* depict U.S citizens stuck between two sides of the war. While both the Zionists and PLO are unwilling to negotiate, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Peter Hacker, fights for peace in a war-torn region, risking his own life.⁴¹ While both Arabs and Zionists reject notions that the other side may have rights to the land, Hacker considers both perspectives. He discusses peace with the diplomatic, intellectual, and street-level members of the Zionist and Palestinian parties. Against the advice of the U.S. Government, he attempts to broker a peace negotiation. It is an Americana journalist, in *Deadline*, who enters into PLO camps, talks to the Israeli government, and attempts to force a discussion about the Palestinian crisis in Lebanon.⁴² In these films, the average American citizen upholds the moral imperative over the Government. The United States and Israeli Governments are likened together in these films. Though none of the characters are successful in brokering

⁴¹ J. Lee Thompson, dir. *The Ambassador* (1984, United States: Cannon Group, 2011), DVD.

⁴² Nathaniel Gutman, dir. *Witness in the War Zone*, original title: *Deadline* (1987, New York: Skouras Pictures, 2003) DVD.

peace, these films highlight the individual over both the military and the government suggesting that the peace process must start with personal communication on a local level.

In *Deadline*, the Zionist Israeli Government enact a vengeful retaliation on innocent Palestinians refugees in Lebanon. As Don Stevens, a journalist, hides in a locked building, gunshots and screams blare from outside. When he finally leaves, the bodies of dead Palestinian men, women, and children line the streets.⁴³ Though Stevens warned the Palestinians that the attack was coming, they decided to stay as they had nowhere to go. While the Arabs in the film were not necessarily innocent, they were defenseless in this attack. This scene is the culmination of the shifted image of Israel as a powerful westernized nation and United States as the level-headed negotiator between two unrelenting forces.

The film, *The Ambassador*, portrayed a dynamic Middle East with opposing ideologies within both the PLO and Israel. Before anyone appeared, words scrolling down the screen served as an introduction to the Israel-Palestine conflict:

The Middle East is a powder keg, ready to explode. A melting pot of conflicting religious and political factions. Israel, with a population of 4 million, is surrounded by 8 Arab countries with a population of 80 million. A group known as the P.L.O. (Palestinian Liberation Organization) has vowed never to recognize Israel's right to exist and to fight until Palestinian homeland is realized. Lately, there are signs that the P.L.O. is willing to talk peace with Israelis. A Syrian based splinter group of the P.L.O., the SAIKA, the most extreme of all existing terrorist groups in the area, spreads terror on both the Israelis and the Arabs to sop any possibility of peace negotiations. Within Israel there are two major conflicting points of view: the moderates, who are ready to sit at the table with the P.L.O. and the right wing extremists who refuse to accept a Palestinian State in the region. The MOSSAD is the intelligence Agency of the State of Israel and protects official Israeli Government position. Into the middle of this burning conflict comes an American...THE AMBASSADOR.⁴⁴

⁴³ Nathaniel Gutman, dir. *Witness in the War Zone*, original title: *Deadline* (1987, New York: Skouras Pictures, 2003) DVD.

⁴⁴ J. Lee Thompson, dir. *The Ambassador* (1984, United States: Cannon Group, 2011), DVD.

It is evident within the introduction to the film that the filmmakers intended to portray the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to highlight the importance of American involvement in peace negotiations. This introduction described Israel as a small nation surrounded by enemy forces, continuing the narrative of Israel as the underdog. While the introduction listed factions with differing ideas of negotiating terms in both sides, the violence and lack of negotiations remained the Palestinian's fault. In order to progress the possibility of an American negotiated peace, Arabs are pictured throughout the film attempting to start peace talks with the Ambassador. However, in the film, these meetings were never successful as other factions of the PLO disrupted or attacked the participants of the negotiations. In the end, it was Arabs who slaughtered everyone as both Palestinians and Israelis met to talk about the possibility of dialogue, perpetuating the idea that Arabs were at fault for the conflict and the failed peace progress.

Depictions of the Enemy from Nazis to Arabs

Through the depiction of Arabs as terrorists, particularly in the films illustrating the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the image of the stereotypical terrorist cemented in U.S popular culture. The history of the relationship between Israel and Palestine centers on the dispute over the same land and the idea of nationhood. Both the Jews in Europe and the Palestinians under the Ottoman Empire developed nationalistic tendencies at the same time as the rest of the world in the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ The claims to the land of Palestine adhered to the idea of creating a national home. After officially gaining nationhood in 1947 through the UN partition plan, the dispute over the location of the capital permeated as one of the largest points

⁴⁵ Gelvin L. James, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 37-38.

of contention. Though the Patrician Plan established Jerusalem under an international agency, the city was divided into East and West after the 1948 war. Israel seized East Jerusalem after the 1967 war and immediately began inhabiting the region.⁴⁶ While the depiction of Palestinians as persistent terrorist in a foreign land persist in popular culture, in reality the conflict resulted from two nations fighting over the same land.

These films often portrayed the conflict as a war between two ethnicities rather than two nations. According to Middle Eastern Historian and political analyst Lina Khatib phrasing it as an ethnic conflict legitimized people's claims based on moral or ethical understanding of history and they could then disregard many of the Palestinian's claims to the land based on proximity.⁴⁷ Arabs represented an aggressive looming force against the righteous Zionists, and there was little discussion of the Palestinians actual claims to the land. *Judith* pictured numerous Arabs attacks on a kibbutz bordering Syria.⁴⁸ The Arabs were not attacking from within Palestine, but rather from a neighboring nation suggesting their presence but not their residence in Palestine. The position of Arabs within films depicting the conflict was important as they perpetuated the myth of an unoccupied Palestine.

After the Holocaust, American films discussing Israel predominantly displayed Jews as either victims or ideal protagonists, while Nazis represented the ultimate villain in American cinema. Since filmmakers depicted Jews as a universal people with an automatic connection to Israel, audiences could assume that the enemy an Israeli Jew was also the enemy an American Jew. Historian, Jack G. Shaheen's extensive list of films portraying Arabs includes *Exodus*, *Cast*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 184.

⁴⁷ Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006),106-107.

⁴⁸ Daniel Mann, dir. *Judith* (1966, United States: Paramount Pictures), DVD.

a Giant Shadow, and Delta Force in the “Worst List” which comprises the films that portray Arabs in the most negative ways compared to all other Hollywood films.⁴⁹ The depiction of Arabs as the enemy formed as Israel became the focus of Jewish identity, shifting Nazism to a more symbolic role with Palestinians as the ultimate antagonists.

The portrayal of Nazis in film was significant to the foundation of the State of Israel, because filmmakers characterized Nazis as cruel, inhumane, and calculated, which increased sympathy for their victims. The villainization of Nazis appeared throughout films depicting concentration camps and battles. Thomas Doherty, a historian of Hollywood and cinema, discusses how in the early years of WWII, filmmakers were willing to portray Nazis more humorously, such as in the comedy films *The Great Dictator* and *To Be or Not To Be*.⁵⁰ However, Doherty describes how the image of Nazis in American film became more somber once people realized the full extent of the concentration camps. Hollywood’s unofficial conclusion that the war should be depicted seriously coincided with their realization that “the enemy is deadly not dumb.”⁵¹ Script writers and directors adjusted their narrative to fit this image. Depicting Nazis as intelligent villains was the standard after the war, such as in *The Young Lions* when screams echoed from the basement of the Gestapo building, serving as a reminder of the organized brutality that the Nazis implemented in their war strategies.⁵² The Nazis’ actions were not accidents or miscalculations, but coordinated efforts to eradicate all but their image of an ideal people based on bigotry and antirentism.

⁴⁹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 141, 173, and 209.

⁵⁰ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵² Edward Dmytryk, dir. *The Young Lions* (1958, United States: Twentieth Century Fox, 2015), Digital.

Though Nazis were universally villainized during and after World War II, U.S. cinema distinguished between ethical Germans caught in the Nazi party and true Nazis who adhered to the ideology. The antagonist in *The Young Lions*, Captain Hardenberg, never hesitated to kill in the name of the war and he demanded the same from his soldiers.⁵³ However, Lieutenant Christian Diestl struggled with the actions of his fellow soldiers. His moral dilemma was pivotal to his development throughout the film, eventually resulting in his mental deterioration and death. After talking to an SS commandant in charge of liquidating a concentration camp, Diestl's obvious disgust leads him to wander aimlessly into the woods and destroy his weapon in frustration. Two American soldiers spot him and shoot him despite his defenseless state, something that seemed unlikely in the beginning of the film as Diestl represented a highly skilled and intuitive soldier. The audience sympathized with Diestl, a "good German" who found out too late that he was on the wrong side of history. The distinction between Hardenberg and Diestl is exaggerated in the film compared to the original book. In the novel, Diestl had none of the same ethical distinctions as in the film.⁵⁴ For the film, the distinction was important to reinforce the image of the Nazi in cinematic culture as an exemplary evil beyond the mistakes of the average person. The juxtaposition between Hardenberg's calculated war style and Diestl's struggle with ethics highlighted the negative Nazi image in American film as separate from the patriotic German. While German characters enveloped an array of character types, the depiction or mention of Nazis elicited a specific negative response from viewers. Films depicting Nazis as the ultimate villain established a narrative of an aggressor against the Jewish people, which filmmakers used as a motif to construct an image of the establishment of the Jewish State.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lawrence Baron, "The First Wave of American 'Holocaust' Films, 1945–1959," *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (February 2010): 105.

Nazis were the villains in films depicting the Holocaust, but as Jewish identity developed in connection to Israel's foundation, the antagonist to the Jew shifted towards Palestinians and Arabs. The presentation of Schiller in *Judith* exemplified this transition. The plot of *Judith* centered around a woman in search for her husband, Schiller, in Palestine who betrayed her during the war. Schiller was an active member of the Nazi party during the war; however, the Israeli intelligence officer declared, "we are not after Schiller the Nazi war criminal, we are after Schiller the Arab tank expert."⁵⁵ It was not Schiller's participation as a Nazi that caused the Israelis to hunt him down, but his contribution to the Arab forces. Set under British mandate and the 1948 war, the focus turned to Arabs as the most imminent threat to the Jews and were the more prominent antagonists. Films often portray Arabs or Palestinians killing innocent civilians on screen, but the same cannot be said for Israelis represented killing innocent Palestinians.⁵⁶ With Arabs as the unrelenting villain to the Zionist cause, films created complex plots as the Palestinians felt they were personally justified in their actions because they lived on the land before the foundation of Israel. While Nazis appeared as calculated and intelligent soldiers fueled by nonsensical hatred for the Jewish people, films portrayed Arabs as violent and radical terrorists who had a personal agenda with the Jewish people.

Even after the foundation of Israel, filmmakers connected the Arab villain to the Nazi party in order to further establish the Arab as the new enemy of the Jewish people. Films such as *Judith* and *Delta Force* provide examples of the depicted connection between Arabs and Nazis. In the 1986 film *Delta Force* starring Chuck Norris, two PLO terrorists hijacked a plane full of United States tourists. Upon learning that there were Jews aboard the flight, the PLO members

⁵⁵ Daniel Mann, dir. *Judith* (1966, United States: Paramount Pictures), DVD.

⁵⁶ Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 296.

collected everyone's passports and asked the flight attendant to sort out all the Jewish names.

The flight attendant is horrified at the idea and explains that as a German she cannot do it stating,

“the selections. The Nazis! The death camps! Don't you see I can't do what you want me to do.”

Still they insist and the following dialogue highlights how film producers aimed to associate the

PLO with the image of the Nazis:

Flight Attendant: You claim you belong to a revolutionary organization.
Hijacker One: That is correct. We are freedom fighters. We are fighting for our brothers.
Flight Attendant: You don't want to be associated with Nazis, who killed six million Jews.
Hijacker Two: Not enough lady, not enough. The Jews stole Palestine. They took our lands.⁵⁷

While the flight attendant offered the PLO terrorists a chance to disassociate from the Nazis, the hijackers refused to listen, and even claimed that the Nazis did not kill enough Jews. Their outward antisemitism and hatred for Israel fueled their actions, linking them to Nazis throughout the film. Understanding that films previously established Nazis as the enemy of the Jewish people, *Delta Force* associated the PLO to the Nazi party and death camp selections to emphasize Arabs as the new antagonist to Jewish suffering.

Paradoxical similarities existed between the depictions of the Zionists fighting for a home in Palestine and the Palestinians who became terrorists after the influx of Jews dislocated them from their homeland. Comparing the Zionists groups depicted in *Exodus* to the portrayals of the PLO in other films set in Israel highlights how these similarities were constructed differently to fit a narrative to support Israel. First, the Zionists and the PLO in these films had similar rhetoric, yet the former were considered heroes and the later villains. In *Exodus* Ari Ben Canaan, a leader in the Haganah faction of Zionist groups, exclaims that of the Jewish people are determined to

⁵⁷ Menahem Golan, dir. *Delta Force* (1986, United States: Cannon Films), Digital.

find their homeland as, “they are all soldiers, and the only weapon they have is their willingness to die.”⁵⁸ In films depicting the early stages of Israel’s foundation and development such as *Cast a Giant Shadow* and *Judith* the terrorists are clear that they are willing to die for their cause. Their rhetoric is similar, their passion equal, but the situation is different. While the Zionists were depicted as either freedom fighters or defenders of their land, the Palestinians were portrayed as extremist terrorists attacking the Jews, their motive never clearly explained.

Similarities even existed between the extremist actions of the Zionist in *Exodus* and the PLO in other films. Both groups were ultimately willing to sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians to further their cause. In *Exodus*, Dov Landau, a refugee from a concentration camp, joined a paramilitary Zionist group known as Irgun, and carried out a terrorist attack on the King David Hotel. The radio in the background professed 91 people dead.⁵⁹ This scene was based on the bombing of the King David Hotel on September 22, 1946 as a retaliation against the British involvement in Palestine.⁶⁰ Despite the violent characteristics of Irgun, the filmmakers of *Exodus* portray them as vigilante Jews who are willing to do all that it takes to make a home for their people. While there is honor in Dov Landau’s terrorism according to the film, similar practices by PLO in other films are depicted as nonsensical and heinous. In *Cast a Giant Shadow*, *Delta Force*, and numerous other films, terrorists put many civilians in danger, but many more Palestinians die in these films than westerners. Still, their actions are depicted as unforgivable.

Irgun was a violent Zionist terrorist organization, yet they appear as underground defenders of their freedom, contrasting the depiction of Palestinians in films such as *Cast a Giant*

⁵⁸ Otto Preminger, dir. *Exodus* (1960, United States: United Artists), Digital.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ T. G. Fraser, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Education, 2015), 33.

Shadow. Set in British Mandated Palestine, the film pictured aggressive Arabs unwilling to negotiate with the Zionists. One scene in particular highlighted the negative bias against the Arabs compared to similar depiction of Zionists in other films. After Palestinians attacked their bus moving through a town, Colonel David Marcus, or Mickey, urged the Zionist officer to fight back or “at least die standing up.” However, as he said this they pass by another bus on fire. A dead woman is tied to the side of the bus with a star of David scraped on her back. The officer responds, “sometimes we do.”⁶¹ The Palestinians had bombed a bus and tortured a woman, seemingly without remorse or purpose. The star of David on her back served as a reminder that the Palestinian population were antisemitic and that their attacks were about more than just land. Though not depicted in films, in reality it was Irgun that first used the now popular PLO tactic of putting bombs on buses and in large crowds.⁶² While many films portrayed Arab terrorists killing innocent civilians, few showed Zionists or Israel attacking Palestinians in the same way. Considering Hollywood’s role in perpetuating stereotypes about Arabs in the Cold War, portraying Arabs as an immoral villain cemented Israel as an ally against invaders of non-Western philosophy. In addition, in the few films that do show Zionists playing the aggressor, they are seen as underdog vigilantes or western allies.

As the conflict between Israel and Arab nations accelerated, the United States took the role as the intermediary between the two groups resulting in a more complicated characterization of the villain in American films. Most of the films portraying Palestinians appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, with the far majority of those appearing in the 1980s.⁶³ This suggests that Palestine

⁶¹ Melville Shavelson, dir. *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966, United States: United Artists, 2002), DVD.

⁶² Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, 102.

⁶³ Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 32.

and their presence in the Middle East captured filmmakers' attention and the attention of the American audience. The narrative of the antagonist in the films changed along with the United States becoming the negotiator. Though the Arabs in the films remained the villain in the end, two films, *The Ambassador* and *The Little Drummer Girl*, both produced in 1984, weaved a counternarrative of Palestinian justice throughout the plot. Therefore, these two films attempted to create complex villain characters and dynamic plots by bringing the Palestinian perspective into the films.

As the relationship between Israel and the United States strengthened during the Cold War, the Zionist image developed from the underdog activists to the empowered ally to the United States. In the 1986 action film *Delta Force*, terrorists associate Zionists with Capitalism and the United States. The film depicted Palestinian revolutionaries hijacking a plane full of American passengers. One hijacker speaks over the intercom, "My name is Abdul Raffi. I am a member of the New World Revolutionary Organization, and we have declared war against the American imperialists, Zionists, terrorists, and all other antisocialist atrocities."⁶⁴ The politics of the Cold War influenced the characterization of both the Arab terrorists and Israel as either against or allied to the United States.

In the *Little Drummer Girl*, the main character, Charlie, believed the Palestinians had a right to fight and defend themselves against the Zionists. Instead of referring to them as terrorists, she used the term revolutionaries. In other films, such as *Rosebud*, *the Ambassador*, and *Delta Force*, only the Arabs would refer to themselves as revolutionaries or freedom fighters; however, Charlie, a white American girl, believes in their movement and even

⁶⁴ Menahem Golan, dir. *Delta Force* (1986, United States: Cannon Films), Digital.

attempted to join.⁶⁵ She soon learned that the man she believed was a Palestinian was actually a Zionist, and that he wanted to recruit her for a mission against a PLO terrorist. The overall message of this film was not necessarily anti-Arab or pro-Zionist, as both sides were depicted as imperfect. Instead, the film served as a representation of the complexity of the situation and the damage the unending war could cause on people involved. Even with the protagonist's supportive rhetoric, the film ultimately displayed Zionists as western heroes and Arabs as villains. The culmination of the plot occurred when the Arab terrorists attempted to assassinate an Israeli professor who had been outspoken in his argument for peace. His character highlighted the narrative that Israelis were able to negotiate for peace while Arabs resorted to violence. Similar to *The Ambassador*, it was the PLO that were unwilling to accept peaceful diplomacy over a violent war. While the prospect of successful peace negotiations was unquestionably difficult and maybe impossible, the film fortified the idea that the Arab terrorists wanted to stop even the possibility of compromise. Within American film, it is this devotion to violence that designated the Palestinians as the perpetual villain while the United States defined themselves as an advocate for peace.

Historically, both the Zionist paramilitary groups and the PLO were minority groups fighting against the dominant nationality in Israel-Palestine. As Israel grew economically, militarily, and politically in the world, the depiction of Israel shifted from an oppressed people standing up for themselves to western leaders, coinciding with a shift in the portrayal of Arabs to radical revolutionaries. The image of Israel became the righteous capitalists while Palestinians became the socialist militants against western ideals. The connection of Arabs to Nazis

⁶⁵ Menahem Golan, dir. *Delta Force* (1986, United States: Cannon Films), Digital; George Roy Hill, dir. *The Little Drummer Girl* (1984, United States: Warner Brothers), Digital.

reinforced the narrative of antisemitism among the Palestinians. The portrayal of Israel and Zionists as allies to the United States and the West, and Arabs portrayal as disorderly and violent revolutionaries confirmed Arabs as the villain in the American mind.

The Problem of Stereotypes

The relationship between Jews, Americans, and Arabs in U.S. films stimulated support for Israel while provoking stereotypical and racist perceptions of Arabs. Jewish identity became both unique and universal as films portrayed Jews as victims of persecution, vigilante defenders of their right for a home, and allies to the United States against the Arab terrorism. Americans played the ultimate heroes in an unrelenting war-torn region. Their moral aptitude and heroic demeanor never wavered as they risked their lives for the Jews in Israel. Nazis transcended through film as an image of unrelenting evil allowing films to apply their negative image to Arabs as the conflict between Israel and Palestine prevailed in world politics. Israel's position in the Middle East encouraged the United States to advance a narrative of Israeli dependency on the United States. Hollywood films largely inspired support for Zionists and contempt for Arabs within their plots, instructing American popular opinion in favor of a Western Israel.

The image of Arabs as terrorists is problematic as heightened Islamophobia in the twenty first-century permeates throughout political dialogue. In order to understand the current political circumstances in Israel and America's role as peace negotiator, people must look back at how these roles filtered into the standard American's perception of the conflict and world politics. Though film did not create these perceptions and stereotypes alone, the depiction of Jews, Americans, and Arabs in films after the Holocaust and the foundation of Israel reflected political movements and cemented the image of the United States as a key player in the Middle East. Israel and Palestine have been at war for over a hundred years, but looking past the politics, the

violence, and the stereotypes the conflict boils down to one simple concept: both people want a place to call their home.

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